

# Military Sealift Command



SMSR Charles C. Balcom, from USNS Ericsson (T-AO 194), conducts hand signal communications with the USNS Kilueaea during an underway replenishment. Ericsson has a crew of 66 mariners and 24 military personnel. Its mission is to provide forward deployed Navy combatant ships with essential fuel that enables them to stay at sea.

## A Day in the Life of USNS John Ericsson

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When a Navy ship is on patrol in the Pacific Ocean and needs fuel, who do they call? There are no Phillips 76 gas stations at sea, so the Navy calls on next best thing — floating service stations of the Military Sealift Command.

USNS Ericsson (T-AO 194) has a crew of 66 mariners and 24 military personnel. Its mission is to provide forward deployed Navy combatant ships with essential fuel that enables them to stay at sea.

The MSC operates more than 105 non-combatant ships who serve the Navy by providing essential logistical support that ensures that Navy ships are combat ready.

The Ericsson has served the Middle Pacific for only one year, but during this time the ship has established itself as a key element of the Navy's forward presence.

Ship's Master, Captain John Wiley, is quick to point out the advantages of an MSC oiler like Ericsson. "John Ericsson does not have to operate under a 'pers tempo' that a Navy ship would be required to operate under," he said.

"We are not required to spend a certain amount of time in port. This means that the ship can be underway as much as it needs to be to service the fleet."

The result of this high operating tempo means that a USNS ship like John Ericsson is able to do the work of two US Navy oilers. For this reason, Ericsson has replaced the decommissioned oilers USS Cimarron (AO 177) and USS Willamette (AO 180) in Pearl Harbor.

On this particular day aboard John Ericsson, it was work as usu-

al as the crew prepared to give fuel to another ship when Ericsson encountered a familiar face in USNS Kilueaea.

MSC ships sometimes replenish each other in order to carry on with their intended logistic mission without having to pull into port. Underway replenishment, or UNREP, as it is called in the fleet, requires the skills and coordination of all hands.

The ship's military detachment works closely with the civilian mariners to ensure that the evolution is carried out in a safe and professional manner.

Part of making an UNREP proficient is through using hand communications that are mastered by the ship's signalmen. On every UNREP aboard John Ericsson, SM1 (SW) George Bradford and his crew of signalmen ensure that essential communications are conducted between Ericsson and its receiving ship.

"Visual communication is the primary means of communication during an UNREP," said Bradford. "We send over messages like fuel specifications and current operation reports. We route information to the Captain, and the information gets disseminated."

"Even if the ships electronic communications goes down, Navy signalmen are there to provide critical communications during an UNREP, which makes the whole evolution, go smoothly," he added.

The signalmen are only part of the Navy crew of 24 Sailors who make up the military detachment, which is lead by Officer in Charge, Lt.j.g. Joseph Tirrell. The detachment also provides Navy Information Systems Technicians (IT), Electronic Technicians (ET) and Operation Specialists (OS).

Operations Specialist 2nd Class James Rose knows first hand how valuable the military detachment is to the everyday operations of John Errisson.

"My job as an OS is to help process and schedule the UNREP requests," he said. "We are a ship's first point of contact when it needs fuel. Most of the time, we know whom our customers (ships) are going to be, and we just focus and prepare (Ericsson) for the evolution."

Along with a capable military staff, Ericsson employs a talented crew of mariners. During this day of operations, the ship was able to conduct unique interservice flight operations with the U.S. Army based out of Wheeler Army Air Field on Oahu.

Members of the two Army UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter battalions used the flight deck of the Ericsson to practice their deck landing qualifications. (DLQ'S). Operations such as these offer valuable training opportunities for both services.

The ship's first officer, Robert Sylvester, spoke of the advantages of interservice operations.

"Anytime we have helicopters landing on our deck, it helps keep my crew's aviation skills sharp," he said. "This is important for reasons such as medevacs and for logistical operations where helicopters land aboard the Ericsson. Also it gives the Army a platform to practice it's landing qualifications."

For the members of the USNS John Ericsson, this day at sea could have been seen as anything but routine — refueling a fellow MSC ship and conducting helicopter operations with Army Blackhawk helicopters.

But to Ericsson and her talented crew, a different day brings a different challenge, all in a day's work.



OS3 Lagregory Wright (above) maintains sound powered phone communications with members of John Ericsson's underway replenishment crew. An Army UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter (below) from Wheeler Army Airfield, conducts deck landing qualifications on board John Ericsson.



ITSN Mack McHam (left) and ET3 Charles Cashman (right) prepare to shoot connection lines to the receiving ship during an underway replenishment.

